Why S.F. Rowing Club Is in Trouble

By Jack Lynch

The San Francisco Rowing Club, a fragile, century-old link to the city's past, faces the threat of being blown out of the water these days, a victim of "outraged" women, onerous legal fees, uninterested city officialdom and — waiting in the boathouse wings — the federal government.

The clubhouse, built at the foot of Fourth street in 1872 and moved three times since then to accommodate state and city agencies, sits now at 504 Jefferson street, near the foot of Hyde street.

Its dwindling males-only membership is threatened with eviction by the city Recreation and Parks Department. The club is waging a costly court battle with a group of women swimmers who want access to the club facilities.

"We are a private club," maintains Roy Lazzari, chairman of the board of directors and chief helmsman in club matters. "The city just doesn't have jurisdiction."

Sandra Terzian, an outspoken woman attorney who has participated in a number of battles involving the rights of women and others, sees it differently.

"As a private club they have the right to restrict their membership any way they want," she said. "But not so long as they're on public property."

Actually, the rowing club's ire doesn't seem directed so much these days toward the prospect of opening the doors to women.

The club's biggest complaint is against the city, which nearly 40 years ago — at the time of the last clubhouse move agreed "to erect as soon as funds are available for said purpose" new facilities for them and the South End Rowing Club and Dolphin Swim and Boat Club, which had also moved to Jefferson street by then.

That was in 1938 and the clubs are still waiting.

That 1938 agreement, in which the clubs also turned over title to their buildings to the city, is at the heart of the current court fight among the club, the city and the women represented by Terzian.

Terzian claims, and the city seems to agree, that the document was a "lease" even though the three clubs haven't been paying rent on the facilities. The San Francisco Rowing Club argues that the document isn't a lease and that they have the right to continue using the facility on their terms until the city provides them with that new club house promised so long ago.

Roy Lazzari, chairman of the rowing club, is at the center of the legal storm

The legal battle has taken a toll on both sides.

Sitting in the club's second floor lounge overlooking the choppy bay water one day last week, Lazzari recounted the club's past days of athletic and nautical glory and the sorry state things have slipped to since.

"We used to have more than 125 members," he said. "Judges, professional men — all of them native-born San Franciscans."

Back in the 1930s, said Lazzari, a tall, fit-looking man of 65 with craggy face and steel grey hair, the club had an active program of competition against other rowing clubs from San Diego to Vancouver, B.C. In those days the club was run by a feisty San Francisco attorney named Elmer Delaney.

"He especially tried to do things for the kids," said Lazzari, who recalled his own first contact with the club when one of the members took him and other youngsters in tow and taught them how to swim.

Under Delaney, said Lazzari, the club hired coaches to train youngsters "from 6 to 16" and then entered them in swimming competitions around the country and paid their expenses.

"And Delaney talked the city into buying the land across the street," said Lazzari, referring to the present site of Victorian Park. Delaney, he said, wanted the city to put in tennis courts and a wading pool for young people.

"But it never happened," complained Lazzari. "The city never really cared about Aquatic Park."

History would seem to support him. The Aquatic Park area had been used as a "dumping ground" for rubble from the earthquake and fire of 1906. The beach wasn't developed and the pavilion (now Maritime Museum) wasn't built until the Works Progress Administration moved in to do it in the late '30s.

In 1940, the city again used the area to dump earth excavated to build the parking garage beneath Union Square.

"We used to have 12 feet of water under the clubhouse," said Lazzari. "We told the city tidal action and storms could shift around that fill and ruin our docks, but they went ahead anyhow."

He said the city promised to repair any such damage, but when a storm wiped out the dock and float facilities a few years later, the city did nothing.

The lack of launch facilities severely crimped the club's boating activity.

For a few years in the 1950s, said Lazzari, the club was allowed to use the "old pumping station" at Lake Merced to launch and row their four-oar racing shells and single scull boats.

But in 1960 "the Rec and Park Commission asked us to give up the station for six months to let some Sea Scouts give lifesaving instructions there. But when the six months was up they wouldn't let us back."

The club's boats were hoisted over the rafters in their Jefferson street boathouse, and in a deposition filed by Lazzari in connection with the court fight, he stated that their boats hadn't been in the water "for ten or 12 years."

Today the club is down to 20 members. "We lost nearly 25 men in just the two years since the suit was filed," said Lazzari. "They didn't want to get involved. And the club is broke. We've spent $30,000 in attorney fees the past two years."

The club's income is modest, said Lazzari. Dues are $40 a year. And they get $200 when they rent out the facilities for dances and other social functions "12 or 15 times a year."

Most of the money spent on attorney fees had been accumulated over the years to furnish and equip that new boathouse they were promised back in 1938.

Lazzari, the owner of the Lazzari Fuel Co. in Brisbane, said other members include a retired bookkeeper, plumbing contractor, a couple of attorneys, a doctor and a longshoreman.

They drop by the club "to get away from the wife and kids for a few hours," work out in a small, second floor gymnasium and to swim in the Bay and sun themselves.

If the aged facilities don't seem worth the flap, they apparently are more attractive than the rundown and — for women — dangerous public locker facilities in the basement of the nearby Maritime Museum.

The area attracts a rougher element than it once did, and a woman swimmer was raped in the public locker room two years ago. That's when a group of women tried to join the boat clubs.

When they were refused membership, about 25 of them sued both the San Francisco Rowing Club and the city to open the clubs to women.

This year, the women's original attorneys withdrew from the case, saying they were owed $10,000 and couldn't sustain further loss. That's when Terzian took up the cause. But now the original group of women has dwindled to only five who are willing to continue the struggle.

"They pay me $50 a month," said Terzian, who added that she doesn't expect to a make any money from the suit but is motivated by her "outrage" at the privileges accorded club members on public property.

And she has hinted that she intends to broaden the suit into a class-action suit against all three private clubs to challenge restrictive membership practices extended to men as well as women.

The Recreation and Park Commission meanwhile has notified the San Francisco Rowing Club that it intends to evict it from the boathouse for its discriminatory policies.

Official notification was received by the club last Monday. In 30 days the city attorney can begin proceedings to evict them from the building.

Philip Steiner, attorney for the rowing club, said, "We intend to fight them in court."

As these battles continue, the Federal Golden Gate National Recreation Area is poised to take over operation of all other facilities and

N. Y. Trying Zoning Weapon

Plan to De-Sex Times Square

New York

The world's biggest red light district.

That is how Times Square was described in recent public hearings, and the description is accurate.

The "adult entertainment" business at the crossroads of the world, as Times Square used to be called, is booming — prostitutes openly solicit, shabby shops offer sex magazines and

Slaying Is S.F.'s 145th This Year

A young man was found shot to death in front of a Turk street apartment building early yesterday. It was the 145th homicide in San Francisco this year.

Police identified the victim as James Parker, 26, a maintenance man for Standard Oil Co. of California. Homicide Inspector Dave Toschi said Parker's body was found in front of 1760 Turk street at 3:40 a.m. yesterday. The victim had been shot in the face at close range.

There were apparently no witnesses to the shooting, Toschi said.

The total of 145 murders in San Francisco this year exceeds the previous record of 142 set last year.

A Shot Man Dumped From Car in Mission

A young man in his late 20s was shot through the neck and dumped from a moving car in the Mission district yesterday.

Carlos Castilliano was in extremely critical condition at San Francisco General Hospital late last night, after more than three hours of surgery.

Witnesses saw him thrown from a green sedan at about 5 p.m. at the intersection of 19th and Capp streets. Although an ambulance was on the scene within minutes, he left a pool of blood that attracted more than a hundred curious onlookers.

Within fifteen minutes of when Castilliano was dumped from the car, police arrested three men on O'Shaughnessey boulevard near Portola drive.

Booked on assault with a deadly weapon and possession of a sawed-off rifle were Barry Denisse, 24, Alfred Vargas, 25, and his brother Miguel Vargas, 21. Their addresses were not known immediately.

The three men were picked up by patrol car officers who heard an all-points bulletin for the green sedan. Police said the suspects attempted to throw the rifle and cartridges into the bushes just before they were arrested.

Among the crowd at 19th and Capp streets was neighborhood resident Peter Gianopoulos, who saw two men gunned down in front of his home last year.

"This is getting to be a little too goddamn much," he said angrily.

Inmate Dies After Setting Fire in Cell

Glenville, W. Va.

A prisoner who threatened to "burn the place down" perished in

shops offer sex magazines and peepshow machines do a brisk trade.

Many customers are dressed poorly and have a hangdog look, fulfilling caricatures of themselves, but many are well-groomed and carry expensive leather attache cases. They line up at such places as the Dating Room, where a pink elevator takes them to a third-floor dive. There girls are advertised for $10.

Sex in all forms is sold everywhere in Times Square despite repeated attempts by the city to curb or dispel such activity.

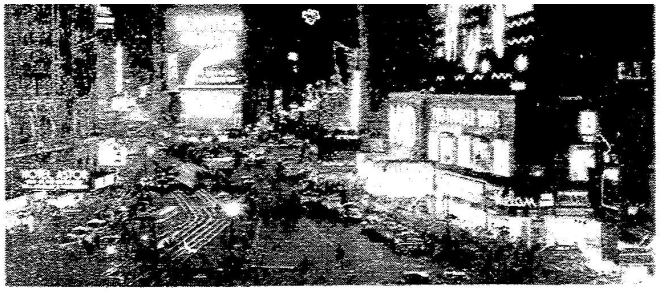
Now the city is trying again with a new weapon: zoning.

Why bring zoning laws to bear when massive police sweeps, city hall harassment and public opinion all have failed over the years?

Because the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that such laws could be used by a city to check pornography. Heartened by that decision, which involved Detroit, New York's lawmakers undertook their latest campaign.

What they have drawn up is, essentially, a three-pronged code devised to eliminate massage parlors, establish a 500-foot buffer zone around residential areas and set limits on the number of adult-oriented business within permitted commercial districts.

What it boils down to, says City Planning Commission Counsel Norman Marcus, is that New York is trying to restrict the location of adult establishments, so that they don't adversely affect the stability of either residential or commercial areas.



Times Square in 1941—long before the sex merchants moved in

If this zoning strategy fails, those involved with it warn, the problem will not be simply the city's. The smut industry, they say, is likely to branch out.

"If we don't settle it here," big, tough-talking William Tatum, head of the city's Midtown Action Office, says "then it's just a matter of time before this stuff will spread out to municipalities and hamlets all over the country."

Sex establishments, he maintains, not only have an adverse effect on the neighborhood but also drive other businesses away.

Tatum conceived the basic plan. Marcus put it into legal form and hearings on it were held recently by the planning commission. The new zoning laws are expected to go to the board of estimate for approval next month.

Attorney Herb Kassner, whose law firm has been retained by a substantial number of adult businesses in the Times Square area, says he is ready to fight the zoning changes in court.

"It's ridiculous," Kassner says. "The city is fiscally bankrupt, and yet it's spending millions of dollars in a fruitless attempt to deny the inherent sexuality of man.

"When a city can find a way to keep a man and a woman out of a closed room," he adds, "then it will be able to eliminate sex."

The ACLU has charged that New York City intends to go beyond what Detroit did because it wants not only to disperse the sex shops but also to eliminate some of them.

A peep show operator, who recently finished a jail term for tax evasion and who doesn't want his name used "because I'm a bull's-eye target," says the adult entertainment industry intends to form a group called the New York City First Amendment Association.

"We're tired of being lied about," he says, maintaining that money for the association would come from contributions from the owners of the estimated 20 sex establishments in the five boroughs.

Newsday

historic ships at Aquatic and Victorian Parks and the nearby Hyde street.

Lazzari and Terzian both look with favor on the idea of the federal government taking over responsibilitiy for the private boat clubs, but federal officials indicate they won't touch them until the legal fight is resolved.

"We see the boat clubs as being part of the rich maritime heritage of San Francisco," said William J. Whalen, general manager of Bay Area national parks. "We hope they will resolve their differences to allow that history to remain. But we can't accept the property with a cloud on its title.

Lazzari, meanwhile, is considering the solicitation of funds from other private clubs to continue the legal battle. He sees it as part of a promise he made to Delaney just before the attorney's death in 1955.

Lazzari said Delaney told him, "If anything happens to me, keep the club going, Roy. Things go in cycles. Someday people will get back to rowing."

Synagogue Bombing

Madrid

An organization calling itself Armed Groups for European Freedom yesterday claimed responsibility for the Christmas Eve bombing of Madrid's Jewish synagogue, which did light damage to the downtown building, breaking windows and injuring no one.

United Press

a Christmas Eve fire shortly after he was booked at the Gilmer county jail on a public drunkenness charge.

While five horrified prisoners looked on helplessly, Robert Scott Bush, 37, died after setting three mattresses ablaze. A jailer led the other five to safety and her quick action was credited in saving their lives.

Bush, of Granisville, had been locked up Christmas Eve for intoxication. Authorities removed cigarets and a lighter in a routine search, according to sheriff Clark James.

Bush had threatened to "burn the place down," but James dismissed the warning as an idle threat.

"You get so many that you're used to hearing threats like that around here," James said. "You couldn't burn this place down if you wanted to."

Fire erupted half an hour after Bush was brought to the jail by constable Ray Dudley. The jailer, Vonda Montgomery, 33, heard pleas for help from inmates and ran to the second floor to investigate.

She released the other five male prisoners. With the aid of some of them, she tried to reach Bush's cell, but the dense, black smoke drove them backward.

Bush was the only occupant of the cell, which contained three bunks and a mattress for each. A juvenile prisoner two cells down from Bush had tossed him some cigarets and a packet of matches, according to the sheriff.

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